



Beyond Productivity and Populism: Reimagining India's Agricultural and Rural Policies

Summary Report

Second Policy Conference of the Network of Rural and Agrarian Studies (NRAS)
26-28 September 2019

Venue: IRD Conference Hall, 7th Floor, Main Building, IIT Delhi

The Network of Rural and Agrarian Studies (NRAS) had organised a conference, titled *Beyond Productivity and Populism: Reimagining India's Agricultural and Rural Policies* in collaboration with IIT-Delhi from September 26-28, 2019 with the realisation that the productionist paradigm of agriculture within the current growth model has run out of steam and we need to look beyond it and re-imagine our policies.

NRAS is an all-India network of scholars, researchers, activists, and farmers, which attempts to articulate an alternative vision for rural India. The primary objective of this policy conference was to bring together different perspectives and pathways of making rural India a democratic and liveable space. The conference was broadly divided into seven thematic sessions, each of which had papers analysing many of the key issues facing rural India today. A distinguishing feature of these sessions was that they were organised as an open exchange among participants with the active participation of farmers in all these sessions.

One of the **key messages** of this conference is that our rural policies have to be re-imagined with *environmental sustainability* at the core. The alternative approach to agricultural and rural issues would centrally involve a transition to an understanding of the agricultural and the rural as essentially part of a larger eco-system. *Agro-ecology* can be the field unifying production and consumption in the rural. The basis of the shift to this perspective is the realisation of co-existence or interdependence (*saha-astitva*).

This implies that the solution to the problem of the rural and agrarian does not lie in the rural at all. It lies in the relationships of the rural with the eco-system, the state, with industry, with urban (even global) consumers, and with discursive ideas that have shaped the imagination

of what is ‘the rural’. Each of these relationships integrates the rural into an adverse structural system that exploits the rural for its resources (food, fiber, minerals, forest wealth), refuses to pay the true costs of those resources, and dumps back its waste. We in Delhi don’t pay the true environmental cost of anything that we consume—the electricity, the water, the food.

When we put the blame of poor air quality on farmers in Punjab burning their fields, we are finally coming full circle and paying the price of this adverse integration. Our state policies cajoled and pushed farmers in Punjab to start growing rice in a region of such low water availability – along with Punjab, we must pay the price for it. Unless we structurally address this issue and transform these relationships from extraction to co-existence, we have a very bleak future. We must find ways to integrate environmental sustainability into patterns of production and consumption.

The **second key message** of this conference is that the proposed shift in policy is important considering the *looming climate challenge*. There is clear evidence that the world has already warmed by 1°C above temperatures prior to the pre-industrial period and is likely to cross the 1.5-2°C redline highlighted by the IPCC. Crossing this threshold will trigger several feed forward mechanisms that have the potential to devastate the earth’s environment and decimate human society. South Asia is one of the two most vulnerable areas to suffer from climate change impacts. Our policy intelligence has to wake up to this challenge urgently. The climate emergency is here and we must move away from economic models that encourage high consumption and expect things to work.

The **third key message** is that the problem of the rural cannot be solved by making the rural itself redundant. The vast diversity of people and occupations in the rural space, within and outside of agriculture has been marginalised in our imagination of the rural. Work that has been ecologically suitable, meaningful and satisfying has been discarded and demeaned as ‘backward’, ‘traditional’, ‘low status’. And adverse integration of the rural with the promotion of industrial products has made much of it irrelevant. Why should the JCB be the only way of the future? Can we not develop technologies that can support the work of rural artisans, fisherfolk, pastoralists, small and marginal farmers, forest dwellers, without replacing them entirely? Can we do away with the drudgery of labour but retain the dignity of labour?

This further means that decision making has to be collective, inclusive, democratic and transparent. Policymaking cannot be confined to the haloed spaces of Delhi and state capitals, but has to come down to where the people, especially the ‘marginalised majority’, are and address their issues and concerns. This links to the **fourth key message**. How do we transform our policy processes – the very act of deliberating, putting together data and bringing on board knowledge, and then making decisions – to reflect and draw upon the wisdom contained in the robust knowledge systems and practices of the local communities in rural India? Could we restructure our policy processes such that the union government may provide a broad perspective or an overarching frame / idea, but its translation (not execution alone) is done by Panchayats across the country?

For instance, if the centre recognises the concept of ecosystem services as a pathway to support farm practices and farm incomes, could we empower our block level officials to make

decisions on how that should be measured by drawing upon agroecology and local knowledge systems, figure out what kind of data is required and commission its collection, get support to build local capacity to undertake this exercise, and ultimately make it work? And work at the Panchayat level to integrate it by also taking on board the need for consultations across caste, class and gender divides that exist even at the village level.

The **fifth and final key message** is that the outcomes of these alternative policy frameworks cannot be assessed using conventional indicators. We need new ones. Unless we *change our measurements* – what is counted and what is left out – we cannot hope to address structural issues of both the rural in general and agriculture in particular. As long as we keep valourising consumption driven growth and increasing GDP continues to be our primary goal, we will continue on the path of crisis. Can we measure productivity and efficiency of farming differently? Can we measure and pay farmers for the ecosystem services that they provide, for the agrobiodiversity that they can help conserve, for the healthy food that they can grow? These alternative metrics will help us assess the ecological and social impacts of our activities, understand the positive and negative feedback loops and take informed decisions.

Dr. Ashok Dalwai, CEO, National Rainfed Area Authority, addressed the gathering and called for “shifting the entire economy away from a terminal system to a circular system.” Prof. Ramgopal Rao, Director of IIT Delhi called for more conversations between multidisciplinary groups like the NRAS and technologists and engineers to come up with a shared understanding of problems and how to address them. Prof. Ambuj Sagar, Head, School of Public Policy, IIT Delhi emphasized that developing appropriate policy processes and understanding the key knowledge-policy relationships was central to the task of translating this alternative vision into practice. Prof. A.R. Vasavi of the NRAS reiterated the need for urgent action given the complexity and enormity of the problem before us.

Dr. Richa Kumar, Associate Professor of Sociology and Policy Studies at IIT Delhi acknowledged the Ford Foundation for its generous financial assistance to the NRAS. She also thanked the IIT Delhi administration for their support and the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Delhi for providing supplementary funding for the conference. Further details regarding the conference, including concept note and photos are available at: <http://www.ruralagrarianstudies.org/conference/nras-policy-conference-2019/>

About the NRAS

The Network of Rural and Agrarian Studies (NRAS) was started by Prof. A.R. Vasavi who was at the National Institute of Advanced Study in Bangalore in response to growing rural distress and the lack of adequate academic engagement with it nearly a decade ago in 2010. Since then we have grown to become a group of about 300 academics, researchers, activists and farmers across various disciplinary perspectives who are deeply interested in and concerned about the conditions of rural and agrarian India.

The NRAS has over the years supported research on rural and agrarian India and provided a platform to share this work through biannual conferences (we have conducted six so far –

Bangalore, Chidambaram, Bhopal, Allahabad, Bhubaneswar and Gandhinagar) as well as through our website (www.ruralagrarianstudies.org).

Second, it has mentored students and researchers and supported the development of teaching materials on rural and agrarian issues through our Mentoring and Outreach initiative (we have conducted five so far in association with our biannual conferences).

Third, the NRAS has sought to engage with the policymaking space and shape the intellectual and public discourse around rural and agrarian issues in India through periodic conferences on policy and other engagements. The first policy conference of the NRAS was held in 2017 at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla.



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Conference Programme

Second Policy Conference of the Network of Rural and Agrarian Studies (NRAS)

26-28 September 2019

Venue: IRD Conference Hall, 7th Floor, Main Building, IIT Delhi

DAY ONE: 26 SEPTEMBER 2019

Inaugural Session: Mapping Recent Trends in Rural India

9:30 - 11:30 am

Chair: V Ramgopal Rao, Director, IIT Delhi

Overview of the Conference Theme: Richa Kumar, IIT Delhi

NRAS Moderator: A R Vasavi, Independent Scholar, Bangalore

The Adverse Integration of Rural India *A R Vasavi, Independent Scholar, Bangalore*

Unequal Exchange of Energy – The Third Horseman *Sagar Dhara, Ecologist, Hyderabad*

Emergent Non-Farm Economies: Issues & Policy Options, *M Vijayabaskar, MIDS, Chennai*

Climate Change and Ecological Trends shaping Rural India *Soumya Dutta, South Asian People's Action on Climate Crisis (SAPACC), Delhi*

De-agrarianisation and Youth *Richard Mahapatra, Centre for Science and Environment, Delhi (note)*

Re-Territorialising the Landscape: Techno-financial Regimes of Land, Insurance, Credit and Debt *M S Sriram, Indian Institute of Management Bangalore (note)*

Chair's Remarks: V Ramgopal Rao, Director, IIT Delhi

Rapporteurs: C Shambu Prasad, Institute of Rural Management, Anand and Abhigya, IIT Delhi

11:30 to 11:45 am

TEA BREAK

Session 2: Questioning Dominant Paradigms of Agriculture and the Rural

11:45 - 1:15 pm

Chair: Srinivasan Iyer, Ford Foundation, Delhi

NRAS Moderator: Siddharth Joshi, Independent Scholar, Bangalore

Framing the problem of agrichemicals management as if the agrarian crisis mattered
Aniket Aga, Ashoka University, Sonipat

National and Transnational Regimes in Innovation and the experience with intellectual property rights Shalini Bhutani, Legal and Policy Analyst, Delhi

Silky rice, wheat flour, maida and little else: Inaccurate food security paradigms contribute to a growing nutritional crisis Sudha Nagavarapu, Sangtin, Sitapur

Questioning the development paradigm prioritising growth in the context of agrarian and climate crises Shreekumar, Sangatya, Udupi (note)

Agroecological transformations and the Future of Work: Lessons from two Green Revolution regions Divya Sharma, University of Sussex (note)

Chair's Remarks: Srinivasan Iyer, Ford Foundation, Delhi

Rapporteurs: M Vijayabaskar, MIDS, Chennai and Anand Prakash, IIT Delhi

1:15 to 2:00 pm

LUNCH BREAK

REIMAGINING POLICIES FOR NEW RURALITIES

Session 3: Conserving Natural Resources, Mainstreaming Agrobiodiversity and Addressing Climate Change

2:00 - 4:15 pm

Chair: Soma Sundar Marla, Principal Scientist, National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources (NBPGR), Delhi

NRAS Moderator: Aniket Aga, Ashoka University, Sonipat

Adivasis and their Forest Gladson Dungdung, Adivasi Publications, Ranchi

Livestock Himakiran Anugula, Senaapathy Kangayam Cattle Research Foundation, Chennai

Fisheries and Coastal Areas Divya Karnad, Ashoka University, Sonipat

Water Ranjan Panda, Water Initiatives, Bhubaneswar

Seeds for a Sustainable Future: Regenerating Plant / Crop Biodiversity, Related Knowledge and Bio-culture Bharat Mansata, Independent Scholar, Kolkata

India's Soils: Science-Policy-Practice Interfaces for Sustainable Futures (note)

Chair's Remarks: Soma Sundar Marla, Principal Scientist, National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources (NBPGR), Delhi

Rapporteurs: Shalini Bhutani, Legal & Policy Analyst, Delhi and Pooja Prasad, IIT Mumbai

4:15 to 4:30 pm

TEA BREAK

Session 4: Making Inclusive, Localised Policy Processes and Strategies

4:30 - 6:30 pm

Chair: Tomio Shichiri, Country Director, Food and Agriculture Organisation, Delhi
NRAS Moderator: Rajeswari Raina, Shiv Nadar University, Dadri

State level autonomy, agroecology, and the heavy hand of prevalent policy structures in Kerala *Sridhar Radhakrishnan, Thanal, Thiruvananthapuram*

Policy meets Reality at the District-Level: The experiences of Kisan Mitra Helpline *Kiran Vissa, Rythu Swarajya Vedika, Hyderabad*

Does patch work really work for farming and farmers? Decentralising processes for planning, implementation and co-creation of knowledge at the village level *Sabarmatee, Sambhav, Rohibanka village, Nayagarh, Odisha*

Agricultural sciences, technology and administration - centralisation and consolidation as a policy process problem *Rajeswari Raina, Shiv Nadar University, Dadri*

Chair's Remarks: Tomio Shichiri, Country Director, Food and Agriculture Organisation, Delhi

Rapporteurs: PS Vijayshankar, SPS, Bagli and Mini K, IIT Delhi

DAY TWO: 27 SEPTEMBER 2019

Session 5: Transitioning to Agro-Ecological Complexes and Re-imagining Rural Production-Consumption Clusters

9:30 - 11:30 am

Chair: Ajay Dandekar, Director, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Shiv Nadar University

NRAS Moderator: C Shambu Prasad, Institute of Rural Management, Anand

From Production to Use: Ecologically Suitable Agricultural Practices *Bharat Bhushan Tyagi, Chetna Vikas Swarajya Trust, Uttar Pradesh*

Millet Mission Odisha: Learnings *Srijit Mishra, Nabakrushna Choudhury Centre for Development Studies, Bhubaneswar*

Farmer Producer Organisations: The New Future? *C Shambu Prasad, Institute of Rural Management, Anand*

Undermining the Rural Economy: Case of the Handloom Sector *D N Reddy, Independent Scholar, Hyderabad*

Reimagining Rural Employment *Amit Basole, Azim Premji University, Bangalore (note)*

Rural Commons / Landscape perspective *Jagdeesh Rao, Foundation for Ecological Security, Gujarat (note)*

Chair's Remarks: Ajay Dandekar, Director, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Shiv Nadar University, Dadri

Rapporteurs: A R Vasavi, Independent Scholar, Bangalore and Abhigya, IIT Delhi

11:30 to 11:45 pm

TEA BREAK

Session 6: Developing Alternate Metrics of Success and Reorganising Data and Reporting

11:45 - 1:15 pm

Chair: Shailja Sharma, Additional Director General, Ministry of Statistics, Planning and Implementation (MoSPI)

NRAS Moderator: Shalini Bhutani, Legal and Policy Analyst, Delhi

Composite Indices Approach Om Damani, Indian Institute of Technology Mumbai and Siva Muthuprakash, Vikas Anvesh Foundation, Pune

Agrobiodiversity and its Metrics N Krishna Kumar and PM Govindakrishnan, Bioversity International, Delhi

Datafication of agriculture in the digital age Parminder Jeet Singh, IT for Change, Delhi

Mindset for Climate Change Ajay Vir Jakhar, Punjab State Farmers' Commission, Chandigarh (note)

Problems with Measuring Agricultural GDP in India Ankush Agrawal, IIT Delhi (note)

Chair's Remarks: Shailja Sharma, Additional Director General, MOSPI

Rapporteurs: Siddharth Joshi, Independent Scholar, Bangalore and Pooja Prasad, IIT Mumbai

1:15 to 2:00 pm

LUNCH BREAK

Session 7: Catering to the Needs of the Marginalised Groups

2:00 - 3:15 pm

Chair: Pramathesh Ambasta, CEO, Bharat Rural Livelihoods Foundation (BRLF), Delhi

NRAS Moderator: PS Vijayshankar, Samaj Pragati Sahayog, Bagli

Forest dwellers Abhay Xaxa, Adivasi Rights Activist, Delhi

Pastoralism at the Cross-roads: The Need for and Outline of a Policy Framework Vasant Saberwal, Centre for Pastoralism, Delhi

Rural artisans in the Contemporary: Policy and Politics of Sustainability Madhulika Banerjee, University of Delhi

Freshwater fisheries policy in India: Needs paradigm shift from production to productivity Neelkanth Mishra, Centre for Aquatic Livelihood Jaljeevika, Pune

3:15 to 3:30 pm

TEA BREAK

3:30 - 4:45 pm

Session 7 (contd.)

Contesting Social Deprivations in a Dynamic Trade Reforms Context: The Curious Case of Tea Plantation Workers in India P K Viswanathan and Kavya Krishnakumar, Amritha Viswa Vidyapeetham, Kochi

Small and Marginal farmers and Tenancy Rajesh Krishnan, Farmer, Wayanad

Tribal Agriculture in Central India: Context and Challenges PS Vijayshankar, Samaj Pragati Sahayog, Bagli (note)

Chair's Remarks: Pramathesh Ambasta, CEO, Bharat Rural Livelihoods Foundation (BRLF), Delhi

Rapporteurs: Aniket Aga, Ashoka University, Sonipat and Mini K, IIT Delhi

5:00 pm

TEA BREAK (Faculty Guest House)

5:30 - 7:00 pm	Breakout Sessions to Develop Policy Position Notes for Plenary Session (at Faculty Guest House)
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DAY THREE : 28 SEPTEMBER 2019

Plenary Session: Promoting Alternative Perspectives and Pathways

9:30 - 11:15 am	Chair: <i>V Ramgopal Rao, Director, IIT Delhi</i> NRAS Moderator: <i>Richa Kumar, IIT Delhi</i>
	Summary of proceedings by NRAS Session Moderators
	Response by: <i>K VijayRaghavan, Principal Scientific Advisor, Government of India</i>
	<i>Ashok Dalwai, CEO, National Rainfed Area Authority, Min. of Agri. & Farmers' Welfare</i>
	<i>Ambuj Sagar, Head, School of Public Policy, IIT Delhi</i>

11:15 to 11:30 am **TEA BREAK**

11:30 - 1:00 pm	Open Discussion: Taking the Agenda Forward
	Chair's Remarks: <i>V Ramgopal Rao, Director, IIT Delhi</i>
	Concluding Remarks: <i>AR Vasavi, Independent Scholar, Bangalore and Richa Kumar, IIT Delhi</i>
	Rapporteurs: <i>Sudha Nagavarapu, Sangtin, Sitapur and Mini K, IIT Delhi</i>

1:00 to 2:30 pm **CONCLUDING LUNCH (Main Guest House)**

MENTORING AND OUTREACH INITIATIVE

2:30 - 5:30 pm	<i>Presentations by:</i>
	Abhishek Saxena , <i>Institute of Rural Management Anand</i>
	Ahfaz Khan , <i>Hari Singh Gour Central University, Gwalior</i>
	Brinda G Krishnan , <i>Madras Institute of Development Studies, Chennai</i>
	Dinesh Rajak , <i>Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi</i>
	Govindapuram Suresh , <i>IIT Tirupati</i>
	Murari Behera , <i>Central University of Gujarat, Gandhinagar</i>
	Sardar Babur Hussain , <i>Institute for Social & Economic Change (ISEC), Bengaluru</i>
	Titu Mahanta , <i>Madras Institute of Development Studies, Chennai</i>